

6 Seasons Past

by telmeastory

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Summary: It has been 6 long seasons since they saw one another. The last time they faced each other had ended in heart break. Can they face one another now?

6 Seasons Past

The mouse shook his head, leaning against a thick oak tree. He wiped the sweat off his brown with his well-worn shirt sleeve. While he wasn't exactly old, the warrior knew his years of traveling had aged him more than it should have. While still young, he was far from the young mouse that had set out from Redwall all those seasons ago.

"Ah well, let's keep moving mate. Might be able to get there before the sun reaches its peak." He shook his head again, enjoying the feel of air flowing across his muzzle. The trees created some great shade from the sun, casting a soft green light from their canopy. That said, it also served to trap the warm moist air on a summer day like today.

He pulled his lithe form from the tree and lifted his tunic from his skin. The sweat dripping down his back certainly made the trip harder. He stepped forth, crossing another root. As he pushed farther forward, the trees began to thin a bit. Well that was certainly a good sign. It had been 6 long seasons since he had been in Mossflower. The woods had always offered a certain level of calm and peace. Today, they felt as confusing as he had ever imagined.

Staring up through a small break in the green canopy, he caught sight of the blue sky overhead. A welcome sight as the humidity had led him to feel a bit trapped. As he moved forward, he noticed exactly what he was looking for peek through the trees.

Those red buttresses, flying high in the sky were a welcome sight to his poor tired eyes. With a new wave of energy, he added a new bouncy step to his pace. He would be there before night

fell!

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Waking slowly from her slumber, the mouse maid stretched out to reach the four corners of her bed. Even after all these seasons, it still felt strange to wake up in such a soft spot. Carefully opening her eyes, she drank in the sight of her room basked in the golden glow of sunset.

So she had slept another day away. One habit she had not been great at breaking. She was sure it annoyed Saxus a bit, but he and everyone else generally left the traveler to her old habits, even if she wasn't a traveler anymore. It gave her some peace and quiet to be awake from dinner through breakfast. She had the entire Abbey to herself and her activities outside where she practiced did not disturb any of her fellow creatures.

Rising carefully and disentangling herself from the sheets, she took her leave of her room. It was going to be a warm night, but at least it wouldn't rain tonight as it did last night. She took a deep breath, opened her door, and with a movement that belied her age, bounded down the stairs toward the Great Hall.

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Before heading in to dinner, Saxus was taking a stroll around the wall tops. He had Skipper of Otters and Rufe with him. It was nice to be surrounded by friends. Of course there were a few friends he still missed. Even his time as abbot, surrounded by caring for other creatures, had left him saddened for a few of his friends. Saxus turned to his friends, both eager to be off to dinner. HE smiled at them.

"Go on now, you two. Don't let my moping slow you down. I'll be in shortly. Skipper, please say grace in my place." Watching the two sprint off, Saxus moved himself down the last few stairs. As he did, he decided to sit down.

Coming to rest on the stairs near the gatehouse, Saxus let out a great sigh. It was time to head to dinner. There he would have to see her. She would never admit it, but these past few seasons, she was different. He felt that was the real reason she had stuck with being awake nights. She was hoping one day he would return and they would be off again. Of course she was never the one they had expected to stay. He had been. But he hadn't been seen in Mossflower for 6 seasons now. There were some who wondered if he was even still alive. Of course Saxus didn't want to give into that line of thinking. It was too painful. Of course, even the painful was not always wrong. They had all lost friends and loved ones. The mouse maid had certainly been no exception.

A giant knock woke Saxus from his musings. It was followed by a shout.

"Hello to the Abbey! Anyone hear me!"

Saxus quickly rose to his feet and moved over. With a great deal of effort, he heaved the bar out and prepared to open the gate. He

laughed to himself, calling to his guest.

"You have impeccable timing, my friend. Just a few minutes more andâ€¦" Saxus trailed off as the doors swung open and his eyes fell on the visitor. It wasâ€¦but noâ€¦how could it be? Saxus felt as if he was staring at a ghost.

"You should try and pick that jaw up off the floor. Not very Abbot-like of you now, is it?" The mouse before him said with a smile. It was infectious and Saxus felt his lips beginning to curl up into as his own smile. Before it got too far, Saxus shook his head and smacked the visitor on the arm. A bit harder than he had intended, but he hoped it got his point across.

"Ow, come now father, what was that for?"

"Don't start with me you rogue, you and I both know. And further, we both know you deserved it." After his outburst, Saxus felt silly and indeed very un-abbot-like. The mouse before him, however, dropped his head with a look of shame gracing his features.

"You're right Saxus. You are, you wereâ€¦she was." He offered the last piece so quietly that he hoped Saxus had not heard. Saxus looked at the crestfallen face before him.

"Well, regardless you are here now. Just promise me some patience." He gave the mouse a knowing look here before he pulled him into a hug. "And Welcome back to Redwall Abbey, Dandin Swordcarrier!"

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As she reached the bottom of the stairs, the mouse maid knew she was in trouble. It was far too quiet for dinner. She slowed her pace in order to peek around the corner, unsure of what to expect. She couldn't see anything, but her patience and quiet was rewarded with a giggle. She smiled to herself before stepping boldly out of the stairwell.

"Well now, I hope no young ones interrupt me on my way to dinner. I'm so hungry that I might eat them instead." There was a squeal when she said this, then she felt several warm fuzzy bodies jump on her. She collapsed under the weight of the dibbuns.

"Boi hokey, usn's gotted youm, so usns did!" Brip the molebabe shouted from his position on her head. Carefully peeling him off of her head, she laughed at her friends wrapped around her. She always found a certain amount of joy in the actions of the small ones.

"Youm surpintly did, moi likkle one." She answered back, trying her tongue at the quaint mole speech. It felt good to see the little ones so excited around her. Of course she knew that probably had more to do with her being so odd in their eyes. She wasn't around during the day much when they were awake, like the rest of the creatures here at Redwall.

"Will you be joining us for dinner, wot?" The mouse maid laughed at the incorrigible leveret wrapped around her ankle named Maddie. Figures it would be a hare to bring up dinner in the midst of their

play wrestling. Disentangling herself from the rest of the dibbuns, she stood and smiled at them.

"It would be my pleasure. Now then, last one there doesn't get any pudding!" With a squeal and a flurry of fur, the dibbuns were off racing one another for seats in the Great Hall with the mouse maid just behind them, making sure no one got distracted or hurt in their rush.

As the dibbuns rushed into the Great Hall, they didn't stop at the table but tore around the room. The mouse maid felt obliged to follow them to make sure they didn't injure themselves in the game she had started. She saw the door from outside open on her second pass and Saxus making his way in. She turned her attention back to the dibbuns just in time to run into the mouse coming in with Saxus. She hadn't noticed him when Saxus opened the door. Running at the rate she was, however, she ran into him with a great deal of force. Rather than knocking him down or bouncing off of him, she felt him turn to wrap his arms around her. He twisted his body to land safely on the ground beneath her, cushioning her own fall.

Saxus turned his attention to the dibbuns. He decided he should intervene with them, trying to draw the attention away from the two mice now collapsed on the floor. "Now settle down, settle down. It is time for dinner and I hear there is pudding! Shouldn't you be there instead?" He elected not to bring up who had started the race, already knowing the answer and knowing it would defeat the point of his distraction.

On the floor behind him, the two mice stared at one another. Dandin offered the mouse maid a sheepish smile.

"Hey Mariel. Imagine meeting you like this."

SMACK!

The whole collection of creatures in the Great Hall turned to face the sound as Mariel pulled herself off of him and ran out the door, slamming it behind her. Letting out a sigh, Dandin stood and prepared to go after her. As he placed his hand on the door, he felt a paw on his shoulder.

"I did tell you to be patient. Let her be just now. Come join us for dinner."

Dandin turned to face Saxus. Saxus watched the tears forming in his friends eyes. Then the warrior let out, in the most painful croak Saxus imagined possible.

"You're right Saxus." The look in Dandin's eyes told Saxus that there was much to discuss. So much for sleeping tonight.

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How Dare He!

Mariel was storming back and forth across the Abbey grounds. She had her Gullwacker out and was swinging it back and forth.

How dare he even dare to show his face here after all this time? More than that, how dare he act like he still had a right to try and protect her, let alone smile at her? HOW DARE HE!

**Flashback**

Just back from their journey from Southsward, Mariel and Dandin were enjoying the peace and quiet. It had been a painful journey, but they were successful. Their return to Redwall had been triumphant, but incredibly loud. Since their return, they had found no peace and quiet which was really what the two tired heroes had wanted. After a week of celebration, Bowly had gone on his way aching for more adventure.

Mariel and Dandin, on the other hand, had not found escape quite so easy. Of course neither were so sure that escape was really what they wanted anymore. While the excitement had been frustrating, it had been nice to be able to relax without having to keep watch or look over their shoulders.

Here they were, nearly two weeks later. The two had gone out for a stroll shortly after the rest of the Abbey fell into a quiet bit of slumber. Finding their way to the top of the south wall, the two had settled to sit beside one another, hanging their legs over the side. The peaceful look of the Abbey had been a lovely serene scene before them.

Letting out a relaxing sigh, Mariel took it in. Then she turned to see the warrior beside her. They had been through so much, seen and done so many things. And Dandin had been with her through it all, supporting her and pulling her through. They had become great partners, and possibly more. It felt great. Suddenly feeling self-conscious about thinking of her friend in that way, Mariel quickly turned her attention back to the Abbey grounds.

Of course, this was not before he had caught her eyes on him. It made him feel good when she looked at him that way. He loved the way her looks made him feel. He was more confident because of her. She had come to mean so much to him and he was sure of his next move. They were only 21 seasons at the time, having been out journeying together for the past 5 seasons. And in that time, he had come not only to care for her as a friend, but as much more.

"_Mariel?" He ventured, slowly. She turned to face him, a question in her eyes._

"_Mariel, I really am glad I got to travel with you. And I am also glad we get to share our time at Redwall now." She smiled back at him, wrapping her arms around him. It was a hug he had come to love and a hug only Mariel could offer._

"_Me too, Dandin. There is no one I would rather travel with."_

"_Mariel, I was wondering ifâ€¦wellâ€¦ummmâ€¦you seeâ€¦uhhhâ€¦" Suddenly feeling concerned, she drew back from her hug to stare at him. She had never known Dandin to struggle with words. Something was wrong. Had her hug been a bad thing? Oh noâ€¦what was he going to say? Did he want to stay here at Redwall? Of course, thinking about

Dandin._

As they stood on the top of the wall, she recounted everything. She recounted her thoughts and how she had reacted. She finished by telling him why she was out here so early. Saxus looked at her with an even sadder look than he had previously shared.

"_Don't worry, Mariel. Redwall is Dandin's home. He'll come back._

**End of Flash back**

Mariel thought back on that day. She had wished she handled it so differently for so long. Of course that was why she had stayed at Redwall. The comfort and the creatures all helped, but it had been because nothing reminded her of him as much as his home.

Of course that had been six seasons past. She had given up hope on seeing him again. And more than that, she had gone to visit her father as he was dying. It had been painful for more than one reason. The old mouse had always been so smart, so brave. He had been powerful and to see him lying there dying had hurt her.

Of course it had hurt more when he had asked about Dandin. What could she say? At that point it had been three seasons since she had seen her warrior mouse. This seemed to shock the old mouse, but he wouldn't say more.

And she had watched him die, losing the second mouse in her life she truly loved.

As she reflected on that, she thought about Dandin. Loved? Well, it was true. It was why she was still here, no matter what else she told herself. Letting out a sigh, she let her gullwacker hang by her side. Maybe she should at least go and talk to him. Sulking off, she turned to try and find him.

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After a quick dinner, Dandin and Saxus shifted out to the orchards. It was quiet and dark and they knew they would not be disturbed while Saxus related his tale.

"I'm guessing Mariel told you about my last night here?" Dandin asked, slowly trying to decipher where he should begin.

"She did. I know everything up to your leaving. Perhaps a bit more, but I would like to hear your story." Always the level headed mouse, Dandin smiled at the thought. Saxus was indeed the perfect choice to become Abbot.

"Well, then you knew I left shortly after. I was out the gate not twenty minutes after she turned me down. I knew why, and I hoped I could eliminate that problem. I didn't leave because she turned me down. I left because I hoped she didn't want to turn me down." At the confused look from Saxus, Dandin went on.

"She said she couldn't marry me while Joseph was so far away. IT wasn't exactly no, but it wasn't yes. So I began making my way back to Southward. Even if it didn't lead her to say yes, she deserved to

see her father again. It was a long journey. It took quite some time, especially because I had to take more care. I didn't have my usual back up. I didn't feel as safe. As it would turn out, I'm not quite as good at traveling alone. I managed to get caught twice on my way down, two different slaver groups. Figures I would be so clumsy, but my mind was elsewhere, with someone else."

Here Dandin noticed the concerned look in Saxus' eyes.

"Not to worry Saxus. I was caught, but it worked out for the best. I managed to escape each time and save several young ones on the way. I figured it was the least I owed both her and Joseph for what I was hoping. Even my personal needs couldn't stand in front of those ideas. So I kept going. I brought the young ones with me to the palace. All told, it took me about two seasons to get there."

Here Dandin's shoulder sagged a bit. HE went on with a bit of a sad part of his story.

"When I arrived, Joseph was already in a bad place. He was well on in seasons and his hard years had left him in a bad place. I asked to see him and naturally he agreed. He asked how his daughter was and if I was taking care of her. I told him she was safely back at Redwall, which seemed to please him immensely.

"Then I dove into why I was really there. I told him everything. I told him about Mariel and my journey across the years. I told him about being there for one another. And I told him I loved her. She meant the world to me and all I wanted to do was give her that world."

Fighting through some sobs which were trying to fight their way out, Dandin went on. Saxus placed a comforting hand on his friend's shoulders.

"I told him about my last night at Redwall. I told him I had asked and what she had said. And I told him I wasn't there to get him to help me. I was there because she needed him. That meant it mattered that he was there. Joseph laughed at me. He asked me to look at him. He was lying on a bed nearing his death. We both agreed there was no way he was making it to Redwall. But he told me he understood. He also said he had seen me with his daughter and knew that I was the only other one she loved on this earth. He took my paw and asked me to always take care of Mariel, whether she would ever admit to loving me or not. I could never refuse. We agreed to send someone to Redwall to inform Mariel that Joseph was dying and to come immediately. We agreed my being there should be a surprise. Of course just a week after the messenger left, Joseph took a turn for the worst. I left to find a route by sea, hoping that the Guosim could help me get back faster."

The Warrior mouse paused here. He took a few deep breaths, watching Saxus take in everything he had said so far.

"Well that explains a few things." Saxus offered. "The messenger arrived and took Mariel off to see her father. She said it had been painful, but that her father kept asking about where you were. Said it hurt even more because she had lost twoâ€¦" He stopped there. Mariel had told him that in confidence. "Because she had lost two mice she cared about and who had protected her."

"Sax, I would have been there if I could. Unfortunately my journey to the sea ended up being far longer than anticipated. As I arrived on the shore, I came across a small holt of otters. They had formed a small village with some hedgehogs and rabbits. They agreed to help me on my way. Apparently we were going to travel up the coast till we found a decent water way. Of course nothing ever goes to plan. We were ambushed a week after leaving the holt by Vistor, a deadly searat. He claimed us for his galley to be slaves, at least until he made it to a port where he planned to sell us off."

Staring down at his hands, Dandin fell quiet for a minute. Saxus gently placed his hand on his friend's back. As he did, he felt ridges beneath the muscled fur and shoulders. Saxus twitched and pulled his hand away. Dandin laughed, though it was more out of discomfort than humor.

"Yes, those are exactly what you think they are. We were whipped mercilessly. It was tough to watch. I had to step in a few times to stop them from killing fellow creatures. Of course this just made the old vermin angrier and they simply whipped me harder. I'll be honest that some days it became hard, but I knew I had to get back. I needed to see Mariel again. Even if she would never have me, I loved her and I had promised Joseph.

"So I waited. I met a few other warriors on the way and we began to make a plan. Unfortunately it was slow in developing. Ended up taking us two more seasons to put it into action. But into action we did. One night we managed to tear out the staples holding us to the floor and attack. We claimed the ship from those accursed vermin. But our journey was not done. We were in the far northern coast by then and no one was exactly great with handling a ship. For some reason the poor beasts all turned to me. So we began working our way south. Every fiber in my being kept screaming for me to return to Redwall, to her. But it wasn't that simple. I couldn't leave those beasts stuck on that ship for me to go try to find her. She would have hated me for that. So we kept going. It took about another season, but we found our way back to the holt. It was a happy reunion for all involved. But my journey wasn't done. I still had one more part left to go."

Turning to face Saxus full on here, Dandin reared his shoulders back. "Saxus, it was the longest six seasons I have ever faced. I watched death and destruction and felt my body torn apart along the way. But none of that mattered. All that mattered was getting back. Back to Redwall, yes, but more importantly back to her. I know she may never hear this and for her sake I hope she never does, but I loved her when I left and if it is even possible I love her even more now." He stopped.

Saxus just smiled. Dandin felt a bit lost. He had hoped the Abbot, his old friend would at least say something. This smiling though, he wasn't sure how to react. Then he noticed that the Abbot was not staring at him, but over his shoulder. Dandin tensed, unsure if he was ready to turn around. Saxus reached out, placing a calming paw on the warrior's shoulder before turning his back to the mouse and walking away.

Letting out a sigh, Dandin turned slowly, keeping his eyes to the ground. Before he saw her feet, he already knew she was there.

"I'm sorry Mariel. I am so sorry." Hearing a snuffle, he slowly drew his eyes up to her face. She was crying. All he wanted to do was comfort her, to hold her in his arms. With one more snuffle, she ran to him and threw her arms around his neck. When she didn't say anything, he took a deep breath.

"How much did you hear?" She let out a soft whimper.

"That much?" He felt her nuzzle into his neck.

"I see. I'm really sorry Mariel, I never wanted you to hear any of that." This drew a laugh. She pulled back, stifling her tears and sobs.

"Danflor Reguba, don't. Just don't. You have nothing in this world to apologize to me for, not now, not then, not ever. I should be apologizing. Everything you went through, just because of me." Her hand on his back slipped across a scar as she said this and she tensed, releasing a sob. "No, Dandin, don't apologize. Let me. And I'm not sure how else to say sorry, but I hope you will accept this apology."

With that, she carefully pulled him down to her kiss. It was the softest, sweetest kiss one could imagine, and yet it spoke volumes of the seasons of missed passion between the two. After carefully breaking the kiss, she pressed her forehead to his.

"I love you Dandin. So much." She breathed against his face.

His mouth turned up into a smile.

"And I you, Mariel. I always have."

What happened next took them both by surpriseâ€¦kind of. Mariel pulled him closer, afraid he was going to suddenly disappear.

"Marry me, Dandin? Be mine forever, just as we should have been all those years ago?"

Dandin let out a laugh of joy. Of course Mariel just heard the laugh and tensed a bit. She was suddenly wishing she had not dropped her Gullwacker when she had run to hug him. He smiled, pulling back enough to offer her one more kiss. Then he slipped from her embrace and began to walk away. Mariel stared at his disappearing back in confusion, feeling tears beginning to flow again. All this and he was just walking away? What?!

As she prepared to give into the tears once again, she heard him.

"Excuse me Saxus, but how would you feel about holding a wedding here in the Abbey?"

End
file.